



Framework of Influential Factors on the Typographic Quality of Text Perceived by its Audience

A thesis submitted by Gerhard Bachfischer, July 2007 in fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Computer Sciences

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Gerhard Bachfischer

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PUBLICATIONS SUPPORTING THIS RESEARCH

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Abstract

The focus of this research was on investigating audiences' experience of typographic designs. This study aimed to identify and explain various influential factors that shape how audiences perceive the quality of such typographic outcomes, as well as organise and integrate such factors and their characteristics into a guiding framework. The main grounding for this research came from a problem identified in the literature review. Typographic literature seems to mainly use 'objective', scientific measurements to formulate precise rules of 'good' typography that can help make text more legible or easier to read. Such rules were seen in this project as a useful foundation for typographic design, but, because experiences of readers seem not to be the same regardless of time, context, or other aspects, this research assumed that there must be other factors that affect the readers' perception of legible forms, but also factors that influence other qualities of typographic outcomes that matter to audiences, apart from legibility only.

The research revealed what other factors apart from scientific legibility rules, and in what way, can influence and, consequently, improve the quality of typographic outcomes perceived by audiences.

An overarching methodology, grounded theory, was employed to help answer the research questions posed in this study, and guided many aspects of this research across the individual studies although the project needed to diverge from the original methodology in the final, theoretical coding stage. This study used grounded theory as a guiding methodology, but it does not claim to create a substantive theory; instead it provides a framework of well-integrated influential factors. Grounded theory lent to this project rigorous and systematic procedures that were very suitable to answer the research questions posed.

The research process in this thesis was divided into four main stages that together informed the typographic quality framework which presents the major contribution of this research. The visual method of auto-driven photo-elicitation (participants were asked to take photographs of typographic outcomes, and such photos subsequently guided the interviewing process) proved to be very suitable to answer the research questions posed in this study. Apart from the proposed framework, an additional contribution of this study to typographic researchers is the review of the auto-driven photo-elicitation method, both from the literature and my own experience in the studies conducted.

This research led to the formation of the framework of influences on the quality of typographic outcomes, perceived by their audiences; the

framework also provides an explanation of the nature of these influences, or their characteristics, demonstrating the specific ways in which the factors influence the quality perceived by audiences.

The proposed framework organises such factors into two major spheres. The ‘object’s sphere’ includes the typographic outcome and various aspects of a text, including the media it is communicated with, its physical surrounding and social environment it is a part of, as well as visual elements that appear with it, and content it attempts to communicate. The ‘subject’s sphere’, on the other hand, includes the factors that stem or are dependent on the individual person experiencing a typographic outcome: the purpose behind the reading activity, the personal background of the one experiencing the text object, an accompanying activity, and the social situation in which the reading of a text takes place. Each of these two spheres are equally important, both encompassing influential factors the effect of which should be considered regarding any typographic outcome’s design.

Factors on both the object’s and the subject’s side influence the expectations formed by people towards a typographic object before they experience it. This ‘experience’ can refer to ‘reading’, ‘viewing’ and ‘using’ text. Various factors influence what expectations are formed, and these expectations, in turn, influence how the quality of typographic design is perceived by audiences.

The framework offers designers a better understanding of how audiences perceive typographic designs, which may lead to improved textual displays. Practitioners are offered an improved conceptual understanding of the multitude of influential forces that can affect the perceived quality of their text designs. The findings may be most relevant to designers working mainly with text, but they can also be useful for other visual communication or interaction design practitioners in their understandings of text design.